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THE VOICE OF THE INNOCENT BLOOD.

A Sermon

PREACHED IN THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

NATIONAL THANKSGIVING DAY,

November 25, 1880,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. J. E. RANKIN, D. D.

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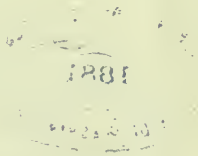

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DEDICATION.

TO THE LOYAL MEN AND WOMEN IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

WHO, FOR THE ELEVEN YEARS OF HIS PASTORATE,

HAVE SAID TO THEIR PASTOR,

"THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH."

THE VOICE OF THE INNOCENT BLOOD.

"And the Lord said unto Cain, What has thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."—*Gen.*, iv, 10.

There is no better method of showing our gratitude to God, for what He has made this nation, than by trying to realize our highest possibilities. This is the noblest *Te Deum* which we can offer Him this Thanksgiving morning. God's standards are perfect for nations as well as men. We struggle up one height, and we think we have reached the very summit of His purposes and of our opportunities. We want a chance to rest and look the landscape over, forgetting that God's commandment is always, "Come up higher!" "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." But there is no rest for them here. When one good thing has been done, it has only prepared the way for the next thing which God would have done. It is God's stepping-stone upward, and we are to plant our feet upon it and mount..

There are people who will gather in their houses of worship, who will gather in their own homes, this 25th day of November, comfortable and self-complacent, thankful in their way, and forget that on the second day of November, when this great free nation were invited to select their Chief Magistrate, to exercise their highest act of suffrage, there were multitudes of their fellow-citizens to whom voting was a farce; to whom the ballot-box was a delusion and a lie; who had no more voice in this selection than if they had been in the Africa of their fathers. Why was this? It was not because, in the day of the nation's peril, they were unwilling to don the nation's blue, to buckle on the knapsack, and stand shoulder to shoulder with their Saxon brothers, till, under our "greatest soldier and greatest citizen," who speaks and votes as he fought, the star of the rebellion went down in night at Appomattox; they who, till then, had known the nation only through her marshals, authorized to seize them and return them to hateful bondage. We sometimes have marshals of a different

complexion now.* It was not because, in spite of their original heathenism, their present ignorance and degradation, they had not the instinct to discern the principles and measures of freedom; to identify themselves and their fortunes with those who had undertaken to fill up that which was behind, in the labors of Hampden and Cromwell, of Thomas Jefferson and Charles Sumner; to identify themselves and their fortunes with those who, at the ballot-box, by legislation and constitutional amendment, were supplementing the work of the men who fought and fell at Bull Run and Fair Oaks and Gettysburg. It was because of these very facts.

Four years ago we waited in prayerful suspense for long months to know, not whom the people had selected as Chief Executive, for in many of the States the voice of the people had been suppressed by violence and blood; we waited in prayerful suspense to see if the God of our fathers would not provide some way by which the suppressed vote of the people might be uttered here at the nation's capital. Some of you think that the Electoral Commission was the work of the wisest politicians. I do not. It was a pit which God permitted some people to dig, that they might fall into it themselves. It was the gallows which Haman erected for Mordecai; but Mordecai never graced it. It was that he might dangle beneath it himself. It was God's method of giving dead men a voice; of granting them what they had been denied at the ballot-box; of showing that the voice of our brothers' blood had been crying up to Him from the ground, and that He had heard it.

Four years ago, this very Thanksgiving Day, a sermon was preached in this house from the text: "And they prayed and said, 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen,'" on "The Divinity of the Ballot." We did not know anything. God knew, and we asked Him to show it. You know how our hearts failed us, and how it seemed as though all the results of the war were to be snatched from us by crime and fraud. Then came the Electoral Commission, with its eight to seven, eight to seven, eight to seven; until, on March 4th, President Hayes was inaugurated. I see in

* Frederick Douglass sat just before the speaker.

that the hand of God; of One who had heard the voice of our brothers' blood.

THE VOICE OF THE INNOCENT BLOOD,

this is the subject which I shall discuss to-day. You have already anticipated it.

There is no voice so penetrating at the court of Heaven, in the ear of God, as the voice of blood. Blood is life, and life is God's gift. The life-blood of the citizen is the life-blood of the nation. There are words uttered by President Lincoln, which have almost the dignity and majesty and power of the old Hebrew prophets. Did—

> "The sunset of life give him mystical lore,
> And coming events cast their shadows before?"

Take these, for example, from his second inaugural address only a few short weeks before his martyrdom. What words for a State paper! "If God wills that this war continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still must it be said: 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." "Until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword!" These are the words which I want to make emphatic. What an awful exchange we found it. Blood for blood; life for life. It was just what Thomas Jefferson meant when he said of slavery: "I fear for the future of my nation, when I remember that God is just." The sword had drawn its retributive blood in almost every household in the land; in the households of the great compromisers with slavery, as well as of the great slaveholders. Col. Fletcher Webster, slain on one of the battle-fields of Virginia, had been borne back and laid beside the dust of the greatest statesman of the land, at Marshfield. This was God's answer to the ridicule of His higher law, of which Mr. Webster had been guilty when he spoke of it at Capon Springs as a law higher than the Blue Ridge—higher than the flight of the eagle. This was God's re-

turn to the home of New England's greatest one, of what he in his majesty had done for the entrenchment of slavery; unwittingly, honestly done, I still believe.

But this was not enough. There was a man, the highest of us all; a great-hearted, tender-eyed, patient, suffering one; a man who had come to his work sadly, tremblingly, prayerfully; who had said on his way here to the capital, that if going forward in the cause of freedom required the shedding of his own heart's blood, he was ready for it; there was a man whom the nation had been taught to trust and love and revere as its Chief Executive; it pleased God to take him also, his great work consummated, the sword of the rebellion surrendered; to take him from the Pisgah height where he only saw the promised land; to take him, the nation's twice chosen Head, in the very flush of our victory, with the words of clemency on his lips; to exact his heart's blood, and this was God's word of reply to the men—Northern men—who had put their Executive signature to such enactments as "the Fugitive Slave Bill" and "the Act repealing the Missouri Compromise," though the hand of our dead President had been set to the Proclamation of Emancipation. And when that funeral car made its long procession to Illinois, with the nation's greatest men as pall-bearers, and the hearts of the whole people—nay, of the whole civilized world—following it as mourners, we knew the full meaning of Mr. Lincoln's prophetic words. It was the Avenger of blood at the Executive Mansion. His sword had smitten low our highest one.

"O captain, my captain, our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weathered every rock, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all are cheering,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grandly nearing.
But, O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where, on the deck, my captain lies,
Fallen, cold and dead!

"O captain, my captain, rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up, for you the flag is flung, for you the bugle swells,
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths, for you the shores are yearning,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning.
Here, Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head;
It is some dream, that on deck,
You've fallen, cold and dead!

"My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;

The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done ;
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won.
Exult, O shores! and ring, O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my captain lies—
Fallen, cold and dead!"

The Mosaic system, notwithstanding some mistakes into which Mr. Ingersoll thinks its author fell, was wonderful for its humanity, and in no particular more than in the value it puts upon human life. For, the more valuable human life, the more every man's rights will be respected; the better every individual man will be treated by his fellow. Turn, now, to the 21st chapter of Deuteronomy, and you will find this record: "If one be found slain in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him, then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure the cities which are round about him that is slain; and it shall be that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city, shall take a heifer which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke, and the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley which is neither eared nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck in that valley. And the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near. (What had they to do with politics?) For them the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto Him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke to tried. And all the elders of that city that are next unto the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley; and they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge.' And the blood shall be forgiven them. So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you."

Notice, here, that God held the civil government of the city nearest the spot where the dead man was found, responsible for the deed; under obligation to make inquisition for this blood-stain upon the land which the Lord their God had given them. The rulers were to proclaim their own innocence and their ignorance of the author of the crime, washing their hands over the heifer be-

headed. They were then to offer prayer to God for forgiveness. This was the old Mosaic ritual. What is the ritual of the United States Government? Do you think God's regard for the blood of the slain—of a man made in His own image—was a thing confined to the Old Dispensation? Do you think He has ceased to listen to the voice which cries up from the ground when one of His creatures is killed? Do you think He is ignorant that there are thirteen volumes of United States legislative documents filled with the outrages perpetrated by the Ku-Klux organizations of the South, simply to suppress what General Hancock elegantly calls "nigger domination?"

General Phil Sheridan reported to the President that official records show that in nine years, from 1866 to 1875, thirty-five hundred persons, mostly colored, were murdered in the State of Louisiana; twelve hundred on account of their political sentiments—that is, because they voted as their instinct taught them.

I am aware that, aside from political questions, human life is far less secure in the Southern States than anywhere else in the Union. I believe it is one of the fruits of the depreciation of humanity resulting from slavery itself. In his recent work, "Homicide North and South," Mr. H. V. Redfield, correspondent of the *Cincinnati Commercial*, a man who has made the subject a careful study, who is not a partisan and writes in no partisan spirit, says this: "Upon a close investigation of this subject it is found (1) that the number of homicides in the Southern States is proportionately greater than in any country on earth, the population of which is rated as civilized; and (2) that the number of homicides since the war reaches the enormous aggregate of at least forty thousand. Taking Texas, Kentucky, and South Carolina as average States, and the year 1878 as an average year, the number is fully fifty thousand. In Texas, during that year, there were more homicides than in the ten States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Minnesota, with an aggregate population of nearly, if not quite, seventeen millions. In Kentucky, the same year, more than in the eight States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota, with an aggregate population of

nearly ten millions. And in South Carolina, that year, more than in the eight States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Michigan, and Minnesota, with an aggregate population of about six millions." Or, if you prefer, take this language from a Governor of Kentucky, before the war. It is in his annual message to the legislature, and quoted by Mr. Sumner in his speech on "The Barbarism of Slavery:" "Men slaughter each other with almost perfect impunity. A species of common law has grown up in Kentucky, which, were it written down, would in all civilized countries cause it to be re-christened, in derision, the Land of Blood."

Now, let it be understood, in such communities as these, that the lives of a few innocent colored men, or the life of a single influential white man, like Judge Chisolm, of Mississippi, stands between a candidate and his election as Governor, or to the House of Representatives, or to the United States Senate, or the Presidential chair, and they are brushed away as so many dead flies, or heaped up in piles like so many dead dogs. It was this fact, which, in 1875, led to the framing of the bill for "The Security of Elections," sometimes called by its enemies "The Force Bill." It was a bill making the forcible invasion of another State felony, punishable by a fine of not exceeding $10,000; making conspiracy to overthrow a State government punishable by a fine of from $500 to $5,000; the use of fire-arms at or near the place of election of United States officers a crime punishable by a fine of from $500 to $5,000; the neglect to give opportunity to register, punishable by a fine of $500 to $1,000; destruction or mutilation of ballots, by a fine of $500 to $3,000 and imprisonment from 2 to 5 years. If, in the attempt to commit any of the above crimes, murder happened, it was murder in the first degree, punishable by death. United States district courts were to have exclusive jurisdiction of such cases; United States supervisors of election were to be appointed in each county, as now in the large cities, and deputy marshals in each Congressional district, in whose presence the votes were to be counted; ballots and poll-lists were to be kept until the close of the first session of Congress after the election, the custodian being liable to a subpœna to produce the original at the national capital; and, finally,

when the State authorities were in complicity with armed efforts to overthrow the rights of the people at the ballot-box, the President was given power, temporarily, to suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*. All fair and equitable, it would seem.

This, for substance, was the bill as originally drawn. Its failure to pass in season for action in the Senate was largely attributed to the Republican leaders of the House, who, by their speeches and by their personal efforts on the floor, did much to control the result. The time had come for milder measures. The commercial spirit demanded them; and in the near perspective arose the Executive Mansion, and possibly this bill might make easy a third term. The failure to pass this bill, and thus to protect the colored voters of the South, temporarily turned over the Government to the men who had sought to destroy it in the field, giving them an apparent majority in both the House and Senate, and almost giving them the Chief Executive. But it also so alienated the deserted South that when one of the same great leaders of the House looked for their votes in two Presidential Conventions these votes were denied him; and no man can say wrongfully so, though I believe the prevalent sentiment of the North was as much at fault as he was.*

Now, I charge that this Government, in its legislative and executive departments, knowing the perils which surrounded the colored voters of the South, basely deserted its own citizens, nay, its own constituents, to the most inhuman outrages. I charge that not one man nominally elected to House or Senate, through peril to the life and limb of a majority of such citizens, was, or is, entitled to his seat. And it was within the province of these bodies, judging of the qualifications of their own members, to say so, and to remand the question back again to the people, until a fair election took place, rather than have men sit there whose official robes were stained with the blood of the innocent; ay, to hold those seats vacant until such a result was reached, if it were till doomsday, when God himself would take their case in hand! And, by not doing so, I charge that they became accessory to the crimes by which such men as Hampton and Butler and Chal-

* One Member of Congress said: "The North never will believe there is hell down there, until the South prove it."

mers secured a *prima facie* claim to their seats. This is the judgment of strict justice; the judgment of God, and I believe, also, it should be judgment of history.

After the Thanksgiving sermon preached in this house in 1876, the author received a long letter of thanks—the letter was more eight pages, foolscap—from ex-Senator Truman C. Smith, of Connecticut, a venerable man now more than eighty years old; a man who stood side by side with Daniel Webster in the great discussions of his Senatorial period. In this letter he thus writes: "When we consider how many citizens of our country were remorselessly put to death, and others cruelly lacerated, for no other reason than that, being of African descent, they proposed to exercise their rights as such; and when we consider, further, how many there are who make themselves accessories after the fact to such horrid wickedness by rejoicing in party success thus obtained, we may well tremble, when we recollect that God is just, and is as sure to punish wicked nations in time as wicked men in eternity, unless both one and the other repent." These are not the words of an Orthodox minister; they are the words of an ex-Senator of the United States. Now, my sense of justice leads me to apply the phrase, accessories after the fact, not merely "to those who rejoice in party success thus obtained," but to every citizen of these United States who has not lifted up his voice against this great iniquity, and especially to every distinguished citizen, from the Presidential chair down, who, during the last four years, has been silent upon this subject. I cannot forget that our present Chief Executive, much as his Administration has done—Providential, as I believe it; much as he, by virtue of his Constitutional power to prevent vicious legislation, has himself done, in the interest of free elections—did yet take his seat by the votes of thousands of men who imperilled their lives for the cause he represented; did yet take his seat in the Presidential chair, and then turn them over to the tender mercies of candidates whose competitors were as fairly elected as was he. I do not believe there was any bargain, but I believe there was an amicable understanding. I believe that the voice of history will be that if Rutherford B. Hayes was elected President of these United States, Chamberlin was elected Governor of South Carolina and Packard, Governor of Louisiana.

There is nothing more disgraceful to the General Government than its impassive submission to these outrages upon its citizens. I am ashamed of such a Government. Respected and honored abroad, it is almost despised at home. An American, a missionary of the American Board, is killed by Turkish banditti, and it is telegraphed all over the world as something by which the civilization of the whole world is shocked, and forthwith a tribunal is created, at the instance of the Turkish Government, over which the American minister to Turkey—our new Postmaster-General—presides, and the guilty men are brought to punishment. But let the missionary be in the employ of the American Missionary Association, and the murder be committed in Georgia or Alabama—especially let him be a colored man—and the whole matter is tamely hushed up, lest any resentment of it, or retaliation for it, provoke greater outrages still. The telegraph does not declare it; the civilized world has no knowledge of it. We have only to take up his body and bury it, and go and tell Jesus, as did the disciples of the beheaded John the Baptist.

But will it be any better in the future? It is safe to trust in God that it will. There is a man who said at Arlington, on Memorial Day, 1868, beside the graves of fifteen thousand men, who though dead—aye! *because* dead—were witnesses: "Those who carried the war for the Union and equal and universal freedom to a victorious issue, can never safely relax their vigilance until the ideas for which they fought have become embodied in the enduring forms of individual and national life." Did they relax their vigilance when they voted against the Force Bill? These ideas are in our constitutional amendments; but they are not in our individual and national life. And again, the same eloquent voice said, on the same occasion: "Peace from the shock of battle, the higher peace of our streets, our homes, of our equal rights, we must secure, by making the conquering ideas of the war everywhere dominant and permanent." "The conquering ideas of the war," how beautifully he expresses it! This to the dead witnesses at Arlington. Living witnesses surged around him in the metropolitan city of the nation—an earnest of the great uprising in November—when he said other words in the same noble strain: "Another thing we will remember.—(Yes, and we will remember

who said this.)—We will remember our black allies who fought for us. Soon after the great struggle began we looked behind the army of white rebels and saw 4,000,000 of black people condemned to toil as slaves for our enemies, and we found that the hearts of these people were God-inspired with the spirit of liberty, and that they were our friends.—(Where should we be to-day had they been our enemies?)—We have seen white men betray the flag; but in all that long, dreary war we never saw a traitor in a black skin. Our prisoners escaping from the starvation of prisons—fleeing to our lines by the light of the North star—never feared to enter the black man's cabin and ask for bread.—(But for bread we have given the black man a stone!)—In all that period of suffering and danger, no Union soldier was ever betrayed by a black man or black woman.—(Who betrayed the colored men of South Carolina and Louisiana?)—And now that we have made them free, so long as we live we will stand by these black allies.—(How did some of us vote on the passage of the Force Bill?)—We will stand by them until the sun of liberty, fixed in the firmament of our Constitution, shall shine with equal ray upon every man, black or white, throughout the Union." True words; noble words. Were they mere rhetoric, like apples of Sodom, fair to the eye, but dust and ashes in the mouth? The man whose great heart prompted them, whose warm lips uttered them, if he will have the courage of his convictions; if he can put them into the individual and national life of the American people, as God and the American people now give him a chance to do; if he will use his large knowledge of men and measures, his magnetism of person and of speech; his grand statesman-like power to do this, we will write his name under and near the name of the martyred Lincoln, next to that of Ulysses S. Grant.

He himself has said: "Abraham Lincoln was one of the few great rulers whose wisdom increased with his power, and whose spirit grew gentler and tenderer as his triumphs were multiplied." We ask this second Abram to take pattern after the first, and we will no longer call him Abram, father exalted, but Abraham, father of a great multitude!

I know that every time we get a new President we are inspired with fresh hope that the consummation is at last attained; we

have found the wisdom and statesmanship we need. Even after the death of Abraham Lincoln, we did not ask, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" We were willing to take what good there was in Andy Johnson, and verily believed him the Joshua of that Moses we had lost. Brief delusion! He promised to make treason odious. But it was something else which he made odious. To quote again from the maxims of the President-elect: "Nothing is more uncertain than the result of one throw; few things are more certain than the result of many throws." Presidential throws? We have just made one. Through Lincoln and Johnson and Grant and Hayes, the great movement of God's providence, uplifting a nation of bondmen, like a new world, from the great deep of civil strife, and the pacification, the settling down to the walks of industry and peace, of discordant elements, have gone slowly forward. Reactions have come. We have just recovered from one at this time. The vessel has just righted again, and is ready to take the wind, every stitch of canvas spread. It remains to be seen whether this new king of men, which we have found among the people; walking among us recognized, but still uncrowned, when he steps on deck, will rise to the dignity of the occasion; will take the helm of the Ship of State as a master; will dare to look with unblenched eye into the eye of the sun of universal liberty; will make his observations in the time to come, as so often in time past, from those heavens where serenely blaze the constellations of the fathers, and will at last, by the voice of a generous people, be set there among them. This is our hope; this is our faith. For this hope, for this faith, we thank God today. God bless James Abram Garfield, the President-elect of the American Republic! God strengthen him by His might, in the outer and inner man! Long live the United States of America! And, as for you and me, let us make this covenant again:

We will not faint or falter now,
Though other toils there are;
We lift to Heaven an unblenched brow,
And thus we solemn swear:

Man's wrongs we still will right them,
Man's burdens, help him bear;
Man's foes, we still will fight them,
And make his cause our care.

Millions for this have shed their blood,
In every age allied;
Shall we not keep the cause still good
For which the martyrs died?

The sun has seen on many a field
The flag man loved go down;
And yet his cause, with blood thus sealed,
Has won at last the crown.

When God incarnate came to earth,
And stooped to save the race,
He wrote in blood man's native worth,
And died to make him place.

So long as God shall give us life,
Fresh toils we will not spare;
Whate'er the field, the same the strife,
The same the vow we swear:

Man's wrongs, we still will right them,
Man's burdens, help him bear;
Man's foes, we still will fight them,
And make his cause our care!

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